

The area described as Morgan Creek Floodplain Forest (M12) has regional significance within both Orange County and the greater Triangle area. On the bluff located at the northwest corner of the Reserve (Mason Farm Pond) is located one of only nine communities of *catawba rhododendron* found in the county, while directly opposite this bluff along the north side of Morgan Creek is a small tract of one of the most mature bottomland forests left in the county (Hackberry Bottom). Less mature but possibly the most important wildlife area in the region, the forest extends southward from the southern and eastern margins of the Reserve, and is the largest expanse of unbroken swampland in the Triangle; it is untransected even by sewer or powerlines.

In addition to the forested natural areas, the lands maintained in cultivation add yet another important element to the Reserve's habitat diversity, especially since the traditional agricultural practice of dividing fields by means of hedgerows has not-yet given way to the agro-technology involving vast monocultures and gigantic farm machinery. These fields have been present since the mid 18th Century and many of our wildlife species have prospered in the field or edge habitats they offer. Sixty-five of the 78 species of butterflies recorded for the entire county occur at Mason Farm, the presence of all but a handful being due to the old-field and edge habitats (no wooded "natural" area within the county is likely to achieve a similar count). The hedgerows also offer wintering habitat for vast numbers of white-throated, song, swamp, fox, and several other species of sparrows, all of which would have been rarely found in the primeval forest. The same is true for abundant cotton rats, voles, cottontail rabbits, and bobwhite quail, all of which are permanent residents of the hedgerows and field edges.

The presence of such a large concentration of prey species attracts, in turn, many raptors and carnivores that are typically quite scarce elsewhere around the region. Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks, and northern harriers all winter commonly at Mason Farm, while red-tailed, red-shouldered, and broad-winged hawks nest within the Reserve. Mason Farm is also one of the few places in the Triangle where barred, screech, and great horned owls can all be heard calling at the same time. Common mammalian predators include the red and gray foxes, otter, mink, and raccoon, but perhaps the most noteworthy resident is the bobcat, an animal whose numbers are dwindling throughout our area and which will require large sanctuaries like Mason Farm if it is to persist.

Altogether, the habitat diversity within the Reserve and adjacent lands make this one of the premier wildlife areas in the Piedmont; it is certainly the best-studied area in terms of its animal populations. The bird community by itself can only be described in terms of superlatives:

As of 1988, the total number of bird species that has been observed at Mason Farm during the approximately 50 years records have been kept is 215 (Hall, Jones-Roe, and Wiley, 1986). This is only one less than for the entire county (only the extremely rare northern goshawk has not been seen there), and is an incredible number for such a small inland area. Eighty-two of these species are considered breeding birds, as documented by thirteen years of censuses, while 74 species have been recorded as wintering at Mason Farm.

Particularly noteworthy are 10 of the breeding species found here that are considered regionally rare in this report. Five of these, in fact, were not observed nesting elsewhere in